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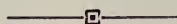
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YOSEMITE NATURE NOTES

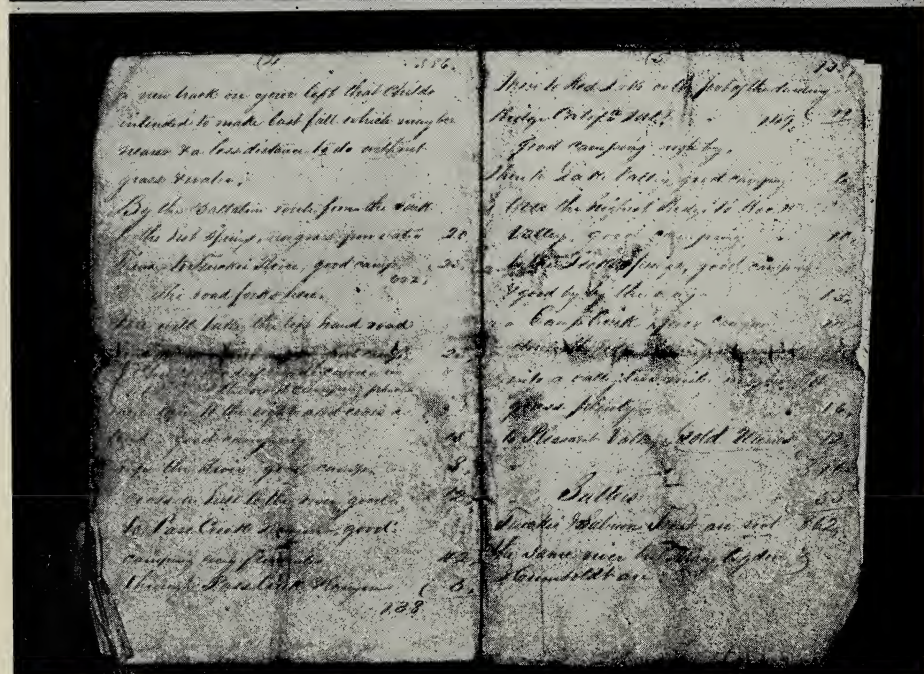
VOLUME XXXII • NUMBER 12

DECEMBER 1953



Yosemite Valley, winter
—Ansel Adams

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THE WILLIS GUIDE

Linen covers and Pages 4 and 5

Reproduced from the original in Yosemite Museum

Courtesy of California Historical Society

Yosemite Nature Notes

THE MONTHLY PUBLICATION OF

THE YOSEMITE NATURALIST DIVISION AND

THE YOSEMITE NATURAL HISTORY ASSOCIATION, INC.

John C. Preston, Superintendent

D. E. McHenry, Park Naturalist

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W. W. Bryant, Junior Park Naturalist

VOL. XXXII

DECEMBER 1953

NO. 12

THE IRA J. WILLIS GUIDE TO THE GOLD MINES

Edited by Irene D. Paden

(Concluded)

EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the second half of the article that was begun in the November issue, being a reprint from the *California Historical Society Quarterly*, Vol. 32, No. 3, September 1953. It describes a remarkable handwritten little book that served to guide pioneers to California during the gold rush, including James Mason Hutchings—California publisher and early hotel keeper in Yosemite Valley. We are greatly indebted to the original publishers of the article, the California Historical Society, and to the author, Mrs. Irene Paden, for their kind permission to reproduce it in *Yosemite Nature Notes*.

III.

The answer to the question why this small handwritten document was salable lies in the fact that it had no competition nor substitute. When the majority of the '49ers left the well-beaten Oregon Trail to head for California, they had no guidebook. Fremont's report of his 1843-44 expedition, which many had used thus far, was useless, for Fremont had continued to Oregon and thence had come south into California. Clayton's fine guide, by way of the trail lying north of the Platte River, stopped at Salt Lake City. Other guides, such as Jefferson's and Ware's, which were published in 1849, were not yet in general use. Travelers were at their wits' end for reliable information. The pull was strong to come west by way of the comforting civilization of the new Mormon city; but Hastings' Cutoff, which had heretofore been the only direct route thence to California, was justly dreaded by all. Willis' guidebook offered an acceptable solution.

The thrifty Mormon people were badly in need of money with which to buy the supplies they could not raise. Every talent, every bit of honest work that could be converted into available funds were utilized. The heavy migration to California in 1849 was a source of income, streaming past their very doors. They raised vegetables and peddled them far out on the trail. They did the necessary blacksmithing. They ran steady and reliable ferries over the larger rivers. They built tollbridges over some of the smaller ones. They pastured tired animals. Now, in Ira Willis' little guidebook they had another commodity to sell. Even though the profits might be small, they evidently went at the project, hammer and tongs. We know that more than one person did the copying, because one traveler complained that his partial copy was poorly spelled. We know that they were done hastily, for the cover of the Yosemite copy bears an uncorrected error. We even know that the

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whole project was done without supervision from competent authorities, because errors in the addition appear. But, no matter how indifferently executed, the little documents were a real contribution.

IV.

How have students of western trails known that such a guidebook existed? Why, quite naturally, through reading the daily journals of individuals who used it. Several instances have come to their attention. Lorenzo Sawyer mentions the Mormon Guide in his notation for June 25, 1850. William T. Coleman wrote, "We were provided with a Mormon guidebook, published by one who had become familiar with the overland routes during the Mexican War, and later by a trip to and from California." The word "published" seems poorly chosen, but Coleman probably meant Ira Willis' production.

J. Goldsborough Bruff mentioned, on August 29, 1849, that he had purchased the latter portion of such a guide, and he proved to posterity that he had done so by copying it in his notes.

Sarah Royce used it. She wrote, "Our only guide from Salt Lake City consisted of two small sheets of note paper, sewed together, and bearing on the outside in writing the title, 'Best Guide to the Gold Mines, 816 miles, by Ira J. Willes, G SL City.' "

Madison Moorman bought a "guide" in 1850. When the author of the present article edited his journal for the California Historical Society in 1948, the subject was discussed and speculated upon at some length in the notes. Actual knowledge of the wording of the Willis guidebook has clarified much of the speculation. Permission kindly given* to quote briefly from the letters of Finley McDiarmid has shed addi-

tional light on the subject. One speculation was the possibility that Sarah Royce and Moorman bought the same guide, and that, as Moorman purchased it over twenty miles out on Hastings' Cutoff, it might be for that route. One of Sarah Royce's statements seemed to make this likely: ". . . we camped," she wrote, "on the head branch of Mary's River, and on Monday morning passed through a canon which brought us to the River itself." Granted that Bishop Creek (on the Fort Hall route) was considered the head branch of Mary's River, her party was unlikely to be well-informed on the subject. Furthermore, in passing through the canyon they were already on the river, and, upon emerging, met nothing larger than they had already seen. On the other hand, if Sarah Royce had traveled by way of Hastings' Cutoff, her party would emerge from the canyon of the South Fork onto the full-fledged river. All of which sounds convincing, but it does not alter the fact that Sarah purchased the Ira Willis guidebook and evidently traveled by its guidance via the new route to the Fort Hall Road. She and her party could not fail to recognize the unimpressive creek which they met after emerging from Bishop Canyon, because it was plainly labeled "Mary's River" in the guide.

Moorman, on the other hand, gave no description of his "guide," but, at the end of the second day's journey out from Salt Lake City, he wrote, "We nooned upon a creek near to a lone house where some men were engaged in fitting some timbers for a sawmill. . . . We purchased from them an imperfect guide for our road. . . ." In view of the fresh information given in McDiarmid's letters, it now seems likely that Moorman's guide was sold by the same

*Acknowledgment is made to Mr. and Mrs. Leroy A. Reynolds of Alameda for this courtesy.

group of men as was McDiarmid's, and that it may have been similar; in which case it was indeed for the desert portion of Hastings' Cutoff.

McDiarmid, traveling about a week later than Moorman, wrote to his wife from the camp at the foot of Pilot Peak at the west edge of the Salt Desert. In the letter, he complained that his party had been led to believe that the distance from water to water across the desert was much shorter than the actuality. "This false information," he wrote, "as to the precise distance across the desert to grass and water was mostly given by a Mormon who was building a sawmill 25 to 30 miles this side of Salt Lake. He sold to the emigrants, who are generally too ready to grab at any information or receive any man's story, a chart or map of the road over the desert, marking the springs, feed, distance &, &. He sets the distance at 60 miles, whereas it is at least 90 if not 100. I here send you a *fact simile* of his map."

In justice to the seller of the "chart

or map," it must be said that, although extremely crude, it does not appear to be erroneous, and the misinformation must have occurred by word of mouth, or, possibly, have been a tragic misunderstanding.

Thanks to Sarah Royce, students knew what the title page of Willis' guidebook looked like. Thanks to Bruff, they knew how some of it was worded. It is a great thrill to see this old copy with its soiled cloth cover, made apparently from a man's linen handkerchief, and its tiny cramped writing. It is like a ghost taken from the middle of the last century and materialized in this.

V.

As to the terrain through which the little guide led its travelers, some of it has been mentioned, unavoidably, in the previous paragraphs; but, beginning at Salt Lake City, it can be set down briefly: Ira Willis was merely reversing the route which he had traveled in returning from California, in order to make the directions suitable for westbound emigrants.



From Nahl painting in California State Library

Sutter's Mill, Coloma, site of historic gold discovery that led to California gold rush.

From Salt Lake City, the route led north through what is now Ogden; it crossed in succession Weber River, Bear River and the Malad, which the '49ers usually dubbed Mud Creek; thence to Blue Springs, thence northerly to Hansel Springs. Deep Creek was crossed near modern Snowville and its short course followed until near its sink. West to Pilot Springs and then Emigrant Spring, reached just at the foot of Raft River Mountains. Thence northwesterly to Raft River. The guide seemingly refers to this stream as "Cajiers," although the word (which appears twice) might be otherwise interpreted. Henry Bigler refers to it in his journal as Cashier Creek, and some of the many variations used by the westbound emigrants were Casus, Cassia, Casua, and other more elaborate versions. An interesting conjecture is that the copyist may have used the old form of "S," which looped below the line as does a "j." Such an "S" would be more correctly used as the second letter in "ss"; it is not found elsewhere in the guide, but, when a person was copying someone else's handwriting, it might easily have occurred.

The new wagon road followed up the general course of Raft River some ten miles, then left it and went past the southern gateway of the City of the Rocks—a lush mountain meadow, studded with and surrounded by huge pointed rocks. Two of these, very prominent beside the trail, Bigler had called the Twin Sisters, but they appear on the guide as Steeple Rocks and are still known by that title.

Now the trail led west "over a hill" ten miles to Goose Creek. This is something special in the line of understatement, as many of the '49ers considered Granite Pass descent very bad indeed. The ascent of Goose Creek took them south into

Nevada, where they passed through Thousand Springs Valley—referred to as Hot Spring Valley. Thence to a branch of Humboldt River, which they followed through a canyon, crossing it nine times. This was the canyon which the battalion men had explored on the way east, while hunting for Chiles' route. It is one of the head branches of Humboldt River and is now known as Bishop Creek Canyon. Then they followed the Humboldt to its sink, and it was here that the purchasers of the guide-book were to look carefully for the wheel marks of Chiles' wagon train, cutting across to the Carson River toward what is now Leetesville. In case they could not find them (or in case Chiles had changed his purpose and had not gone that way), the purchaser was to continue on the regular trail to the Truckee River and there pick up the tracks of the battalion members. Their trace connected the old trail up the Truckee with the new trail they had made along the Carson, probably leaving the old ones somewhere west of what is now Wadsworth, and striking the Carson a few miles east of Dayton. Thence up the Carson to the canyon of the West Carson, and so on across the Sierra Nevada to Hangtown, as previously outlined.

The route became at least as popular as the trail up the Truckee River, and, dividing the burden of the gold rush of '49 with the latter, and with the Lassen Trail, brought its fair proportion of new citizens to California.

Ira Willis was in Lehi, Utah, in 1849, the year following his return to his people. We know that he was married, and the fact of his death is established among the records of the Mormon Church as having occurred on December 5, 1863, from the accidental overturning of a wagon-load of wood.

Best Guide to the GOLD MINES

816 miles

by
IRA J. WILLIS

G. S. L. City

Way Bill of distances, camping
place, rivers, hot springs etc on
the Route from G. S. L. City to
the Gold Mines. Miles.

To Bear River, crossing the Weber
4 miles this side of Capt Brown's
Roadometer Measure 84.
(Good camping at short distances[])

Thence to Malad or Mud Creek 3.
" " the 1st Warm Spring 6.
" " " 2nd do camping 14.
" " " Spring in the Mts. good camping 12.
" down deep Creek cross at the Bend 6.
" " " good camping 6.
" to Springs in the plains poor " 10.
" " Cajiers [or Cajius] Creek, good camping
at several places in sight on left 26.
" up Cajiers [or Cajius] Creek, good camping 9.

176.

(2)

Thence to the Old Road near
the Steeple Rocks, 6.
" to Goose Creek over a hill 10.

192.

Several camping places from the
Steeple Rocks to Goose Creek
" up Goose Creek, good camping 22.
" to the Hot Spring Valley 13.
" " " 2nd Spring (good camp[]) 5.
" through the Valley 32.
Found good camping places,
none of them more than 10 miles apart
" to a Branch of Mary's River
good camping 8.
" through a canyon crossing
the Branch 9 times, camping 8.
" to Mary's River good camping
all along 19.

299.

" Martins Fork of Mary's River
good camping all along 60.

359.

(3)

Thence over a hill through a canyon
to where you strike Mary's River again 20.
(good camping & good in the canyon.[])

Then to a pass in the hills where you
cross the River twice good camping
all along 72.

" " The next crossing of Mary's River
good camping all along 46.
" over a drive without grass or water 14.
" to the lower crossing of Mary's River
(good camping[]) 14.
" to the lower camping place on the
River, grass scarce 26.
" to a Slough, poor camping grass scarce 15.
" " the Sink of Mary's River
grass & wood scarce 20.

586.

The best water here is in a slough
that passes through a bend & a narrow
Bluff. Here also you may find

(4)

a new track on your left that Childs
intended to make last fall which may be
nearer & a less distance to do without
grass & water.

By the Battalion route from the Sink
to the hot Springs, no grass, poor water 20.
Thence to Truckie River, good camp. 25.

622.

[Should be 631]

The road forks here.

You will take the left hand road
to Salmon Trout river, good camp, 25.
(Childs road if made comes in
at this or the next camping place[])

Then turn to the right and cross a
bend, good camping 15.
up the River good camp, 8.
cross a hill to the river, good " 12.
to Pass Creek Canyon, good
camping every few miles 42.
through Pass Creek Canyon 5.

738.

(5)

Then to Red Lake or the foot of the dividing
Ridge Calif. Mts. 11.

749.

good camping, nigh by.

Then to Lake Valley, good camping 6.
" over the highest Ridge to Rock
Valley, good camping 10.
" to the Leek Springs, good camping
& good by by [sic] the way 13.
" " Camp Creek, poor camping 10.
" down the ridge & then you arrive
into a valley two miles, on your left
grass plenty. 16.
" to Pleasant Valley, *Gold Mines* 12.

816.

" " Sutters 55.

862.

[Should be 871]

[] Truckie & Salmon Trout *not*
the same river but Mary, Ogden &
Humboldt are.)

"WHAT HAPPENED TO YOSEMITE FALLS?"

By Henry G. Weston, Jr., Ranger Naturalist

End-of-the-season visitors often confront the ranger naturalist disappointedly, asking the question "Where is Yosemite Falls?" or "What happened to Yosemite Falls?" The falls are, without doubt, one of the features most responsible for the universal fame of Yosemite Valley. They have been described in paintings, photographs, and writings as well as in spoken words by innumerable admirers. It comes, then, as a disappointment to many travelers when they realize that due to seasonal changes in amounts of water in streams of the Sierra Nevada, Yosemite Falls—like all the others in the park—present a varying aspect at different times of the year. As the summer season progresses and the melt water from the preceding winter's snowpack dwindles, the volume and force of Yosemite Creek

become appreciably less. Very little rain comes during the summer to sustain the flow. The appearance of Yosemite Falls changes accordingly, and by late August the creek and the falls are reduced to a mere trickle, barely discernible as it descends the steep face of the valley wall. Usually, even this trickle dries up, leaving a bare, water-stained cliff to greet the visitor.

The drying-up dates of the spectacular 2,425-foot-high series of falls have been recorded for a number of years by the naturalist staff of the Yosemite Museum. Beginning with 1947, these dates are as follows:

Year	Date flow stopped
1947	August 19
1948	August 21
1949	August 16
1950	August 18
1951	August 15
1952	Some all summer, essentially dry October 1
1953	Some all summer, essentially dry September 15



Yosemite Falls

Ansel Adams

The gradual diminishing of Yosemite Falls from its springtime splendor of free-leaping, matchless beauty to its final thin, wavering "damp streak" occurs every year. As in the plant and animal world, summer takes its annual toll of waterfalls. For those guests, then, whose particular attraction to Yosemite Valley is the prospect of viewing the world-famous Yosemite Falls, we can only urge that they time their visits in late spring, so as to fully enjoy the peak of the display as the falls cascade and catapult in a mighty leaping plunge down the side of the cliff. Whatever the season, though, many other features—if not waterfalls—that comprise Yosemite's year-long charm make any visit a rewarding one.

INDIAN GRAVESITES OF THE YOSEMITE CEMETERY

By Richard R. Jackson, Ranger Naturalist

Past visitors at the Indian circle in the Yosemite Museum wildflower garden will recall many interesting experiences talking with some of the old Yosemite Indians. Today the park visitor will find it difficult to see or hear phases of their early-day customs, for the aged descendants of the original inhabitants of this area are disappearing. Along with their passing, it seems that their much-enjoyed folkways also are vanishing.

Ta-bu-ce (Maggie Howard) and Chief Lee-mee (Chris Brown) will long be remembered for their contributions to the continuance of Yosemite Indian lore. Ta-bu-ce died 7 years ago next month, and as of this year Chief Lee-mee finds it no longer possible to perform his dancing. We are fortunate in having Lucy Telles, some seventy years of age, still coming to the Indian circle whenever her health will permit.

Because of the enduring interest on the part of travelers to the park, and the loss of many of the old Indians, I felt that a supplement to Mrs. H. J. Taylor's chapter on "Cemetery in Yosemite Valley" from *Yosemite Indians and Other Sketches* might be of some value for a continued source of knowledge in regard to these native residents. Mrs. Taylor has a wealth of information on the establishment of the cemetery area, and important facts about most of the white people buried there, but few data are available for our use pertaining to the Indian graves. The remaining portions of this article, therefore, will offer collected bits of information on the 10 Indian gravesites in the Yosemite Cemetery, gathered from many

sources, including interviews with Indians now living in Yosemite.

Nine of the grave markers are redwood boards that have been placed in recent times, while the tenth is simply a granite boulder. The following accounts are headed by inscriptions exactly as they appear on the 10 markers:

SALLY ANN
CASTAGNETTO

DIED
APRIL 10
1932

YOSEMITE

Sally Ann Dick Castagnetto was a fullblood Yosemite Indian. Her father was Indian Dick, and her mother was May Dick. Sally Ann was considered to be one of the most beautiful of Yosemite Indians. She was full of life and very talkative. Her first husband was one of the early miners by the name of Stegman. After he died she married Johnny Brown. The name Castagnetto is connected in some way with a man whom Sally Ann took care of while he was very ill, then living in Coulterville. Castagnetto had a vegetable garden near El Portal, and sold vegetables to the people in Yosemite Valley. He became sick and moved to Coulterville where Sally Ann was nurse to him.

MOTHER
OF
LUCY

PART
YOSEMITE

Very little knowledge seems to have been retained about the mother of Indian Lucy Brown. Early photographs of this lady show that she must have been extremely old at the time of her death.



Section of Yosemite Cemetery with Indian graves.

*Herkenham*MAY
TOMAGED 14
PIUTE

May Tom was the young niece of Ta-bu-ce (Maggie Howard). It is said that May was killed by a tree that fell on her while she was hiking on the Yosemite Falls Trail with Ta-bu-ce. The tree also hit Ta-bu-ce and broke her leg, which never did heal properly, so that she walked with a slight limp the rest of her life.

MAY
DICK

YOSEMITE

May Dick, the mother of Sally Ann Dick Castagnetto, was a full-blood Yosemite Indian. Her husband was often called Indian Dick, though it is thought that his real first name was Charlie. Indian Dick worked for many of the early settlers in Yosemite Valley by providing wood. He was one of the first woodcutters to use a power saw in this area, thereby outdoing all of his rivals in that business.

GRANDMOTHER
OF
LUCY TELLES

Suzie Sam, Lucy Telles' grandmother, was a Yosemite Indian, born in Yosemite Valley. Her husband was Captain Sam. Old Captain Sam was employed by Camp Curry and the Sentinel Hotel to supply them with fish. Many of the early Indians were well versed in their abilities to catch trout, but they would not reveal the methods that made them so successful. 'Lucy Telles' grandmother died in the month of August, about 1904.

LUCY

DIED
1920PART
YOSEMITE

Lucy Brown, or Indian Lucy, said to be nearly 120 at the time of her death, was one of the last of the original Indians who had been found in Yosemite Valley at the time of its discovery by white men in 1851. She was the oldest of six genera-

sons of the Brown family, many of whom have lived most of their lives in Yosemite. Her grave is beside that of her husband, Bill Brown. She was the cousin of Maria Lebrado, who was the last survivor of the original Yosemite. The date of Lucy's death has been recorded in several other documents to be in 1924.

BILL
BROWN

DIED
1899

YOSEMITE

Bill Brown, or Mono Tom Brown, was the husband of Indian Lucy, father of Johnny, and grandfather of Chris Brown. He was one of the first Indians to be buried in the Yosemite cemetery area.

LANCISCO
WILSON

DIED
1885

PIUTE

Lancisco was the father of Johnny Wilson. Lancisco's Indian name was A-tok-a-nu-la, meaning El Capitan. He was one of the old chiefs of the Yosemite, aged approximately 115 years at the time of his death.

JOHNNY
BROWN

DIED
1934

YOSEMITE

Johnny Brown was born about 1860 at Rancheria Flat near El Portal.

He was married first to Sally Ann Dick. His second wife was Lena Brown, and they had four children--Chris, Virgil, Alves, and Hazel. Chris Brown (Chief Lee-mee) was named after the very popular early Yosemite artist, Chris Jorgensen. One of the last Indian burial ceremonies of Yosemite Valley took place during Johnny Brown's funeral. Chris Brown and Lizzie, last surviving Nutchu, performed the Indian rites at the burial.

PETE
HILLIARD

1870 1934

Pete Hilliard was born in El Capitan Meadow in Yosemite Valley. He was part Yosemite and was thought to have a small amount of Chinese blood. He was very intelligent and did such work as surveying. With Francisco Georgely he surveyed Bridgeport Tom's place near Bloody Canyon when the latter first entered that region for farming. Pete lived most of his life in Yosemite Valley working for the Government. His sister, Louisa Westfall Hilliard, died last year, nearing 100 years of age.

There is considerably more factual material to be gleaned about the old Yosemite Indians. Only time and patience are required to collect and coordinate it. Many of the Indians and white old-timers still living are intensely interested in having this information recorded, so the task is a pleasant and stimulating one.



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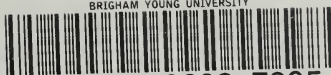
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